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John E. Rybolt C.M., Ph.D.

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Pictures from the Past — New Saint-Lazare¹ —

By

JOHN E. RYBOLT, C.M.²

Saint Vincent de Paul, so far as is known, was never on the property of the present motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission. He may have noticed the grounds, inasmuch as he worked in the area, but the oldest buildings date from 1685-1686. This present large house has sometimes been called the new Saint-Lazare. It replaced the old Saint-Lazare, ruined by the infamous sack that took place during the night and early morning of 13 July 1789, the eve of the taking of the Bastille. During this disaster, the superior general, Jean Félix Cayla de la Garde (1734-1800), fled for his life by climbing over the garden wall. He later hid out in France and then took refuge in the Palatinate (a region in modern Germany), and later in Rome, where he died. The revolutionary government then abolished all religious congregations in France, declared their vows null and seized their properties.

A decree from Napoleon, dated 24 May 1804, reestablished the Congregation of the Mission. Dominique Hanon (1757-1816), the French vicar general from 1807 to his death, had much to suffer, since Napoleon suppressed the Congregation anew on 26 September 1809. Further, Hanon was jailed in Paris, then under house arrest and finally imprisoned in Italy from May 1811 until 13 April 1814. The Congregation, reestablished 3 February 1816, had to wait until the election of Charles Verbert (1752-1819) as vicar general to receive a house from the government of Louis XVIII. To compensate for the loss of the original Saint-Lazare, the Vincentians took possession of the former Hôtel (or city residence) of the duke of Lorges. The state had acquired this house for the Congregation's use from the hospital across the street, which gained it at the Revolution. The Vincentians became lodgers (the government owns the property, the Congregation has use of it), and the house officially opened on 9 November 1817. At the time, the house, 95, rue de Sèvres, included: (1) a

¹ The illustrations featured are produced from original glass negatives. They were made in 1904 and 1905, but the photographers were listed on only a very few of them. One was a priest, Lucien Misermont, C.M.; and the other was a student, Edouard Rouger, who left the Congregation of the Mission before his ordination.

² The following is an edited excerpt from John E. Rybolt's *In the Footsteps of Vincent de Paul: A Guide to Vincentian France* (Chicago: DePaul University Vincentian Studies Institute, 2007), 450 pp. Part historical overview, part travel guide, the book offers an extensive view of sites throughout France, both major and minor, related to the Vincentian Family. The book is available for purchase online at <http://vsi.depaul.edu>, click on Bookstore; or inquire by phone at 312-362-7139.



Main Façade, 95 Rue de Sèvres.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Maison-Mère, main entry courtyard (Cour d'Honneur)
featuring statue of Saint Vincent de Paul.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



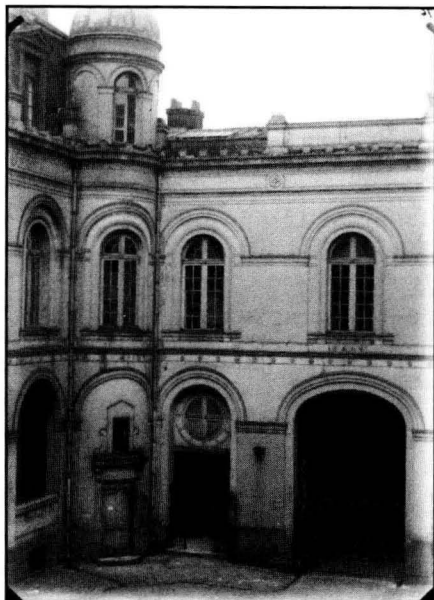
Interior courtyard main garden, looking west. Note formal plantings.
Superior General's suite on second floor above entry.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

three-story main house, with courtyard and garden; (2) a two-story section looking out on Rue de Sèvres, joined to the main house by two side buildings, one story each, used as stables, storehouse, and hay barn; (3) a one-story wing situated where the present refectory is located. The community moved into cramped quarters as best it could. Jean Baptiste Étienne (1801-1874), a seminarian at the time, recalled: "It was the stable of Bethlehem."



Main chapel, Reliquary of Saint Vincent closed.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

On 17 August 1826, the vicar general, Charles Boujard (1752-1831), laid the cornerstone of the chapel. Previously, there had been only a tiny and unsuitable oratory. To build the chapel, the Congregation acquired adjoining property, 5 July 1826. Next the left wing of the old Hôtel de Lorges and half of the adjoining house were demolished to make way for the chapel. Then, during the generalate of Pierre de Wailly (1827-1828), construction on the chapel continued, and the archbishop of Paris, Hyacinthe de Quélen, blessed it on 1 November 1827. Little by little, the community acquired adjoining properties: in 1835, numbers 92, 94, and 96, rue de Cherche Midi, located at the rear of the present property; and in 1875, number 90. By a strange coincidence, Jean-Léon Le Prévost (1803-1874), founder of the Religious of Saint Vincent de Paul, lived at number 98.



Inner main courtyard looking north-west.

Porter's office and main entry visible.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Maison-Mère, 97 Rue de Sèvres courtyard, looking southwest.

The clerical suits pictured are worth note.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Third floor novitiate dormitory – the “Seminary” – above main chapel.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

Above the chapel were built the rooms in Corridor Saint Mathieu and the dormitory for the novitiate. Father Étienne, then superior general, undertook the construction of the present refectory, the prayer hall, a large number of rooms in Corridor Saint Marc, and an oratory for the novices. Always careful about the beauty of the chapel, he had a new main altar built, with two staircases leading up to the casket of Saint Vincent. Then, in 1857, because of the needs of the ever-increasing community, he bought the property at 97, rue de Sèvres, and built another wing on that land. Next, in 1864, he constructed the right-hand wing of the main entry courtyard, and side aisles for the chapel now grown too small. At that same time, the façade of the central building was rebuilt, and a bell tower added, to announce the Congregation to its neighbors. The last section bought was 93, rue de Sèvres, built by the zealous superior general as lodgings for retreatants and Vincentians passing through. In forty years, this new Saint-Lazare had become again a “place of resurrection,” as Saint Vincent described the original Saint-Lazare to his confreres. (Conference 9)



93 Rue de Sèvres courtyard, looking west.
Chapel on left, with the kitchen behind.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

During the celebration of Father Étienne's jubilee, Eugène Vicart, his first assistant general for many years, could say with no little triumphalism: *We love to look on you as our second founder, and if this title is ever questioned, if one day the Company forgets what it owes you, may the stones themselves cry out and accuse us of ingratitude.*



Maison-Mère, main floor parlor.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

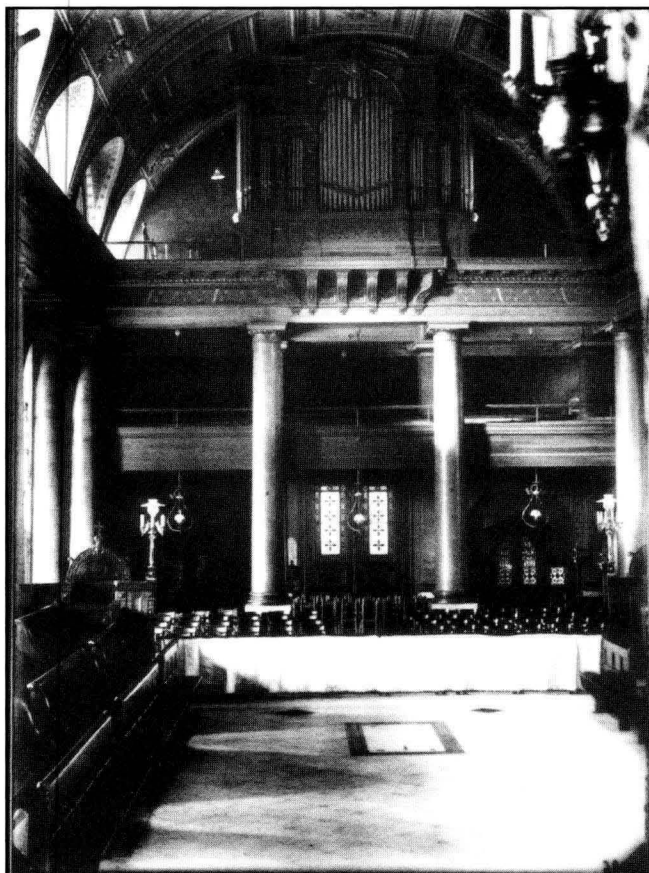
The house contains many souvenirs of Vincent de Paul. The most noteworthy, of course, is the silver casket containing his remains, and placed over the main altar in a solemn ceremony in 1830. His body is not incorrupt. Although the skeleton has been hidden or transferred several times because of wars, revolutions, and religious celebrations (the latest in 1960), it has been preserved. Wax covers the face and hands. The crucifix in his hands is the one he used when assisting Louis XIII on his deathbed. This precious souvenir passed down through the royal family that gave it to the archdiocese of Paris. At the time of the translation of the relics in 1830, the then archbishop of Paris and his canons gave it to the Congregation to be used as it is today.



Third floor novice chapel, looking east. Note pulpit at front right.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Second floor north wing,
 view toward community chapel – now the community refectory.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

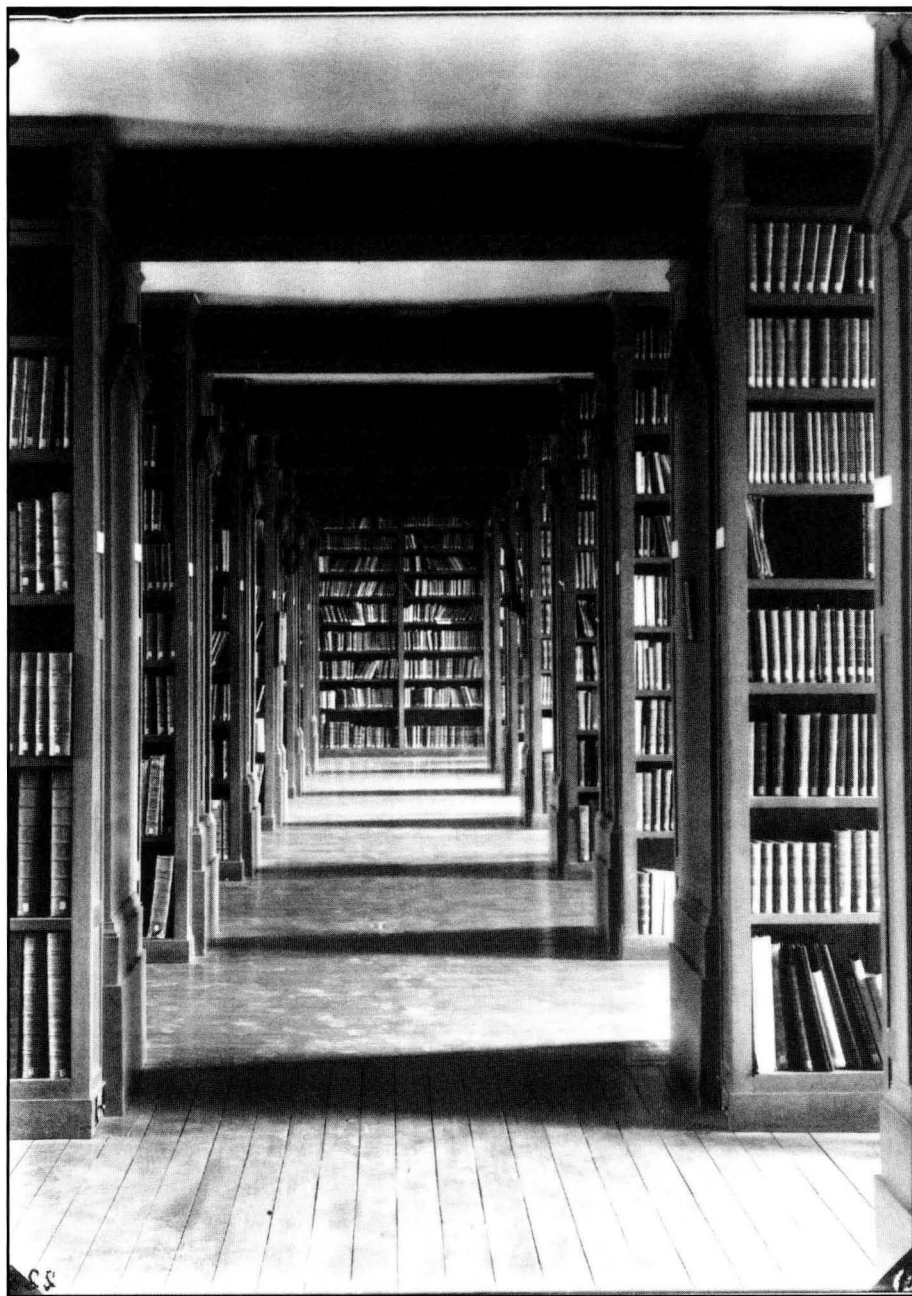


Main chapel, looking west.

Tomb of Jean-Baptiste Étienne, C.M., fourteenth Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, seen at center. The Organ pictured above was designed by Cavaillé-Coll.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

Other items of great importance are the tombs of Saint John Gabriel Perboyre (1802-1840), canonized in 1996; Saint Francis Regis Clet (1748-1820), like Perboyre a martyr in China, canonized in 2000; and Jean Baptiste Étienne, superior general from 1843 to 1874. The extraordinary cult of personality surrounding him led his confreres to move his body from the Montparnasse cemetery to a tomb in the center of the chapel, surrounded by the remains of the founder and two martyrs, as well as by his confreres at prayer. The remains of the two martyrs were transferred for safekeeping to the Vincentian house in Liège, Belgium, from 1907 to 1919, avoiding complications arising from the anti-clerical laws then in force in France and the first World War.



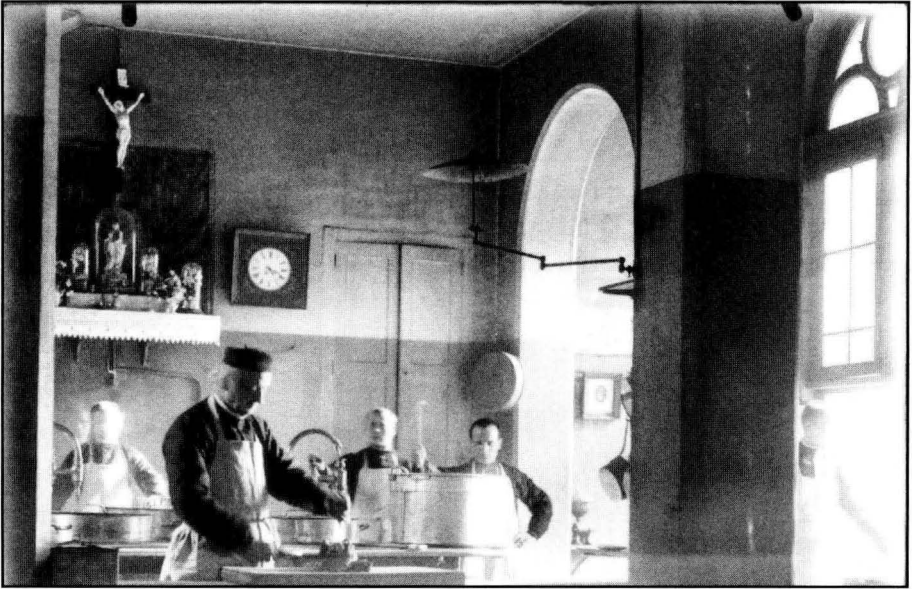
Third floor library.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

A major side chapel is dedicated to the Passion of Jesus. Built in the time of Father Étienne, it commemorates two similar devotions: the “Scapular of the Passion of Our Lord and of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary” (the Red Scapular), and the Archconfraternity of the Holy Agony of Our Lord. The first developed through the experiences of Sister Apolline (Louise Alice) Andriveau (1833-1895), a Daughter of Charity. The second was popularized through the devotion of a Vincentian, Antoine Nicolle (1817-1890). Shrines to honor the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Olives characterize many older Vincentian churches.



Lecture hall, looking west, second floor above kitchen. Student at podium
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

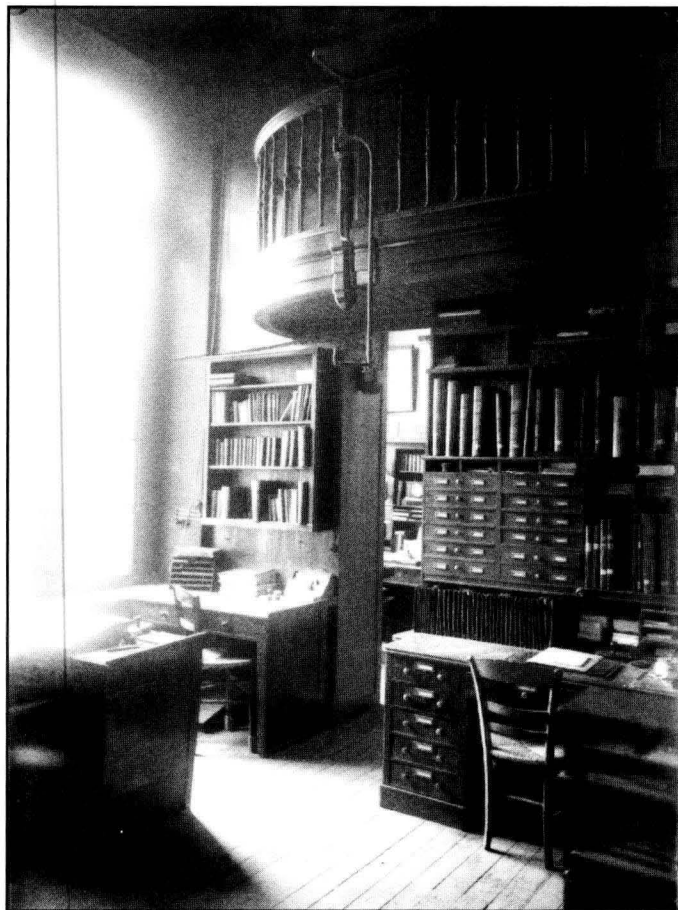
The tribune of the chapel, reached from inside the building, features some side altars and confessionals, but the main items of interest are the eight large canvases painted by Brother François Carbonnier (1787-1873). He was a trained artist at the time of his entry into the Congregation in 1839, having studied at the studio of the painter Ingres. His paintings hang in several other places in the building. The small organ, built by the renowned Cavaillé-Coll, was completed in 1864 and is a registered historical object. Power used to be supplied by manual pumping, but the instrument is now electrified.



Kitchen, brothers cooking.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

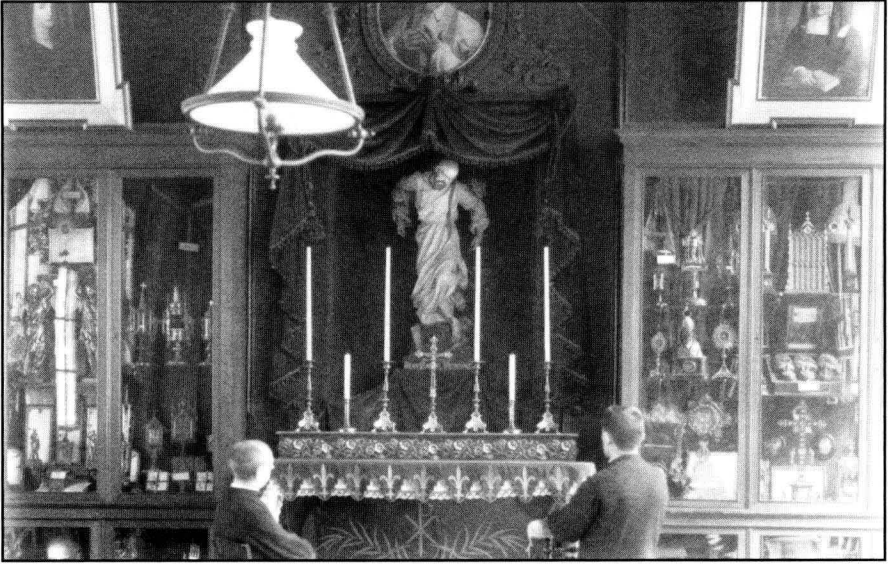


Main dining room, looking west.
Tables, made by brother carpenters, formally set with wine.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

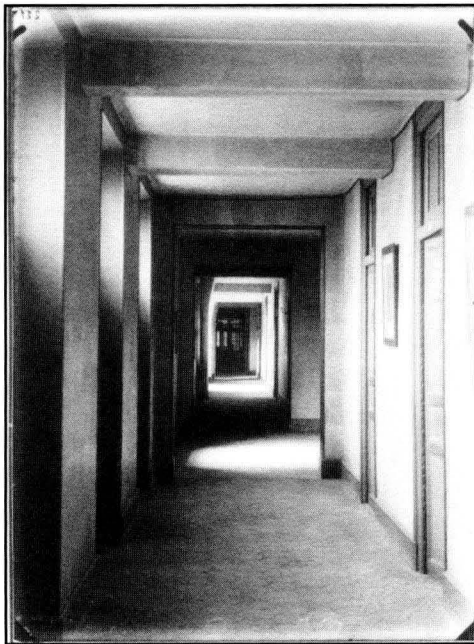


Second floor Office of the Économe Général (Treasurer). Note the gas lights.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

The Salle des Reliques (Musée Vincentien) displays many items used by Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac (1591-1660), the saints and some of the blessed and other members of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Most noteworthy is a miniature painting of Vincent, one of the few authentic likenesses of him painted during his life. Another original, or perhaps an early copy, is found in the sacristy of the main chapel. This is believed to have been in the possession of Anne of Austria, Queen of France (1601-1666) who gave it to the Vincentians as they began their work at the Invalides (1675), where it remained until after the Revolution. A former chaplain restored it to the Congregation in 1809. Today, it is the first in a series of portraits of the superiors general that Brother Carbonnier and others have painted.



Maison-Mère, main floor Relic chapel
 – now the Musée Vincentien – looking west.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Third floor corridor, looking north.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL



Main garden, looking east toward statue of Mary. The infirmary is behind.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL

The long narrow building at the rear of the property began as the Seminary of Saint Vincent de Paul in 1899, an annex of the Institut Catholique for young priests. Its first superior was the remarkable Fernand Portal (1855-1926). He had entered the Vincentians in Paris, hoping to go to China as a missionary. During his studies, his health deteriorated, so after his ordination in 1880, his career turned to seminary teaching. He met Charles Lindley Wood, Lord Halifax (1839-1934), an Anglican, on the island of Madeira where Portal had gone for his health, and Halifax accompanied his daughter, also seeking recovery. The two worked to increase contact and understanding between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and pursued the historical issues separating them. He made this seminary a center for contacts among Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants. He was silenced by Rome in 1908 and left his post. His interests continued and he and Halifax planned ecumenical dialogues on a more official level. With Rome's permission, Cardinal Mercier of Malines, Belgium, sponsored these "Malines Conversations" from 1921 to 1925. Both Portal and the cardinal died in 1926, and such conversations were put on hold until the era of Vatican II. The seminary buildings are divided between provincial offices and a hotel. (88, rue du Cherche Midi, Paris 6)



Maison-Mère, rear garden and buildings, looking west.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, IL